An Application on the Production-Oriented Approach (POA) in English Writing Teaching in High School

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Abstract: The Production-Oriented Approach (POA), a significant theoretical achievement in the field of foreign language education in recent years, in China, aims to address the persistent challenge of the separation between learning and application. It emphasizes guiding learning through authentic output tasks to enhance students'overall language competence. This paper focuses on the application of POA in senior high school English writing instruction. By combining a literature review with case analysis, it explores the implementation pathways of POA in writing instruction and the challenges that may arise. The study finds that POA is effective in motivating students, promoting language output, and fostering critical thinking. However, certain challenges remain in areas such as task design, scaffolding, and evaluation mechanisms. Based on the analysis, this paper proposes suggestions including optimizing instructional procedures, strengthening teacher training, and constructing diversified scaffolding and evaluation systems, in hopes of providing both theoretical support and practical guidance for the deeper integration of POA into high school English writing instruction.

1. Introduction

In the backdrop of the new era of curriculum reform, the proposal of core competencies in English subjects has placed higher demands on senior high school English writing instruction[1]. As a concentrated manifestation of students' overall language competence, writing not only requires a solid linguistic foundation but also strong logical thinking and intercultural communicative awareness[2]. However, in current teaching practice, English writing instruction in high schools still faces prominent issues such as "emphasizing input over output," "vague or superficial writing tasks," and "single-mode evaluation," all of which hinder students' writing development and dampen their learning motivation[3].

Considering the cognitive development level and language acquisition stage of senior high school students, it is crucial that instructional approaches align with their developmental characteristics and learning needs. Teaching strategies that are overly advanced or disconnected from students' real-life contexts may lead to cognitive overload or disengagement, while overly simplified approaches may fail to stimulate deeper thinking or meaningful language use[4].

To address these issues, Chinese scholars in recent years have proposed the Production-Oriented Approach (POA), a theory that centers on "enabling learning" and is driven by "productive tasks."

POA emphasizes guiding students to learn through output tasks set in authentic contexts, with the ultimate goal of "learning by doing" and "applying what is learned." POA not only reconstructs teaching concepts and classroom structures in theory but has also been continuously verified and promoted in practice, especially achieving notable success in college-level English instruction. However, compared with the extensive exploration at the tertiary level, the research and application of POA in senior high school English writing instruction are still in the early stages, with many issues worth further investigation[5].

Therefore, this paper aims to explore the application of POA in high school English writing instruction, in alignment with the requirements for writing skills outlined in the General Senior High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition, Revised in 2020). By analyzing a case lesson, this study seeks to examine specific pathways for practical implementation, identify existing problems, and propose feasible suggestions for instructional optimization, in order to provide both theoretical support and practical reference for the improvement of high school English writing instruction.

2. Theoretical Foundations of POA

2.1 Origins and Development

The Production-Oriented Approach (POA) is a foreign language teaching theory system with Chinese characteristics, proposed and continuously refined by Professor Wen Qiufang and her research team at Beijing Foreign Studies University since 2007[15]. In its initial stage, POA introduced the "Output-Driven Hypothesis," emphasizing the role of output tasks in driving the language learning process[6]. In 2013, Professor Wen further proposed the "Output-Driven—Input-Facilitated Hypothesis," which emphasized the role of targeted input to facilitate learners in completing output tasks based on output-driven learning. In 2015, POA officially formed its 1.0 version, establishing a teaching process based on "driving—facilitating—assessment."[7] In 2017, it evolved into version 2.0, further refining its teaching philosophy and practical operations. By 2019, POA had reached version 3.0, emphasizing the teaching philosophies of "integration of learning and application" and "assessment to promote learning," forming a more complete theoretical system.

2.2 Core Concepts

The core concepts of POA include the following four teaching hypotheses:

1) Output-Driven Hypothesis: This emphasizes the design of challenging output tasks to stimulate students' learning motivation. Through attempting to produce language output, students recognize their own language deficiencies, thereby generating an intrinsic need for learning[8].

2) Input-Enabling Hypothesis: After students attempt output tasks, teachers provide targeted input materials to help students fill in gaps in their language knowledge, facilitating the completion of output tasks.

3) Selective Learning Hypothesis: Teachers should select and teach language knowledge relevant to the output tasks, avoiding the generalization of teaching content. This enhances the focus and efficiency of instruction[9].

These 3 teaching hypotheses together form the theoretical foundation of POA, emphasizing task-oriented output, the integration of input and output, and the comprehensive development of students' language abilities[10].

2.3 Teaching Process

The teaching process of POA consists of three phases: "Motivating—Enabling—Assessing," forming several cyclical chains[11]. The process is as follows:

Motivating: In the initial phase of teaching, the teacher designs authentic communicative contexts and presents challenging output tasks to stimulate students' interest and motivation. Through students' initial attempts at output, they become aware of their language deficiencies, thus generating an intrinsic need for learning.

Enabling: Based on the language issues exposed by students during the driving phase, the teacher provides targeted input materials and learning activities to help students fill in their language gaps, improving their ability to complete output tasks[12].

Assessing: After students complete the output tasks, the teacher and students collaboratively establish evaluation criteria and provide feedback and assessment on the students' output. Through evaluation, students reflect on their language use and further enhance their language proficiency.

This teaching process emphasizes the "integration of learning and application," driving learning through output tasks, integrating input and output, and promoting the comprehensive enhancement of students' language abilities.

3. Application of POA in high school writing teaching---A case

The selected case involves Unit 4, Lesson 3, "The Internet Harms Friendship," from the PEP Compulsory Book 2. The instructional goal was for students to write an argumentative essay titled "The Internet Benefits Friendship,"[23] thereby practicing persuasive writing through the POA framework, as outlined below: As shown in the figure, the corresponding relationship between the POA phase and related activities is illustrated[13]. The POA phase comprises three stages: Motivation (Motivating), Facilitation (Enabling), and Evaluation (Assessing). The motivation stage initiates tasks, the facilitation stage provides conditions for task completion, and the evaluation stage measures task outcomes. Correspondingly, in terms of activities, the motivation stage involves creating real scenarios, attempting outputs, and setting clear goals; the facilitation stage involves analyzing text structures, brainstorming, and adding evidence; the evaluation stage involves setting evaluation criteria, peer review, and revising improvements. These activities closely align with each stage of the POA phase, from task initiation to completion and subsequent evaluation and optimization, forming a complete process. This provides a logically clear framework and step-by-step guidance for the smooth progress of tasks or projects, thereby enhancing the efficiency and quality of work or learning.((Figure 1)
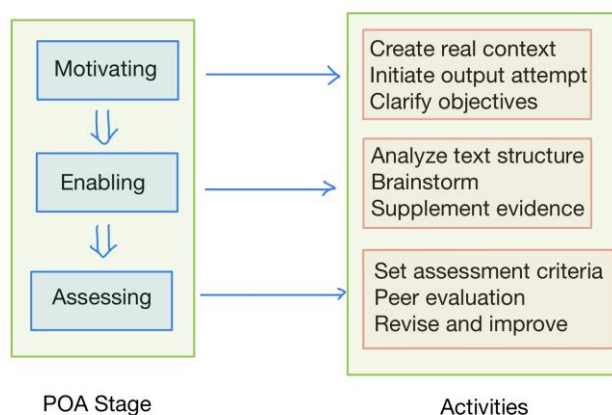

Figure 1: Flow chart of the process of POA writing teaching

3.1 Motivating Stage: Clarifying Objectives and Stimulating Motivation

Creating a Real Context:

The teacher organizes a classroom English debate with the topic[14]: "Does the Internet harm friendship?". Students choose their own stance and engage in initial expression.

Initial Output Attempt:

Students express personal viewpoints and reasons based on the debate topic. The teacher records students' opinions on the board. Through this process, students become aware of their difficulties in expression, thus generating an internal learning need[15].

Clarifying Learning Objectives and Tasks:

The teacher introduces the final classroom task: writing an argumentative essay titled "The Internet Benefits Friendship" to discuss the positive influence of the Internet on friendship. Students are guided to understand the three key goals:

Linguistic goal (target vocabulary and sentence patterns),Structural goal (organization of an argumentative essay), and Communicative goal (persuasive and coherent expression).

3.2 Enabling Stage: Building Scaffolding and Achieving Objectives

Analyzing Text Structure:

Students quickly review the textbook article and summarize the basic structure and outline of an argumentative essay (title – statement of opinion – arguments and evidence – conclusion).

Brainstorming Arguments:

Students work in groups to generate various arguments in favor of the statement "The Internet benefits friendship." Each student selects three preferred arguments and fills them into a writing framework[16].

Supplementing Evidence:

The class analyzes argumentative techniques in the textbook (such as quotation, examples, and cause-effect reasoning) and supplements these with additional methods like data and comparison. Students are guided to match their arguments with logical and persuasive evidence.

Training in Language Cohesion and Expression:

The focus shifts to the use of linking words and synonym replacement to strengthen language variety and coherence, laying a solid linguistic foundation for writing.

Draft Writing:

Students integrate the above input to complete a first draft of their essay, ensuring a well-structured, clearly argued, richly expressed, and logically sound piece.

3.3 Assessing Stage: Multi-dimensional Evaluation to Foster Reflection and Improvement[17]

Setting Assessment Criteria:

The teacher and students co-construct assessment rubrics based on content, structure, language use, and coherence, enhancing transparency and goal alignment in the evaluation process.

Peer Evaluation of Model Essays:

Selected student essays are reviewed and discussed in class, helping students recognize common issues and effective techniques.

Revision and Improvement:

Students revise their drafts based on feedback to complete their final versions, thereby forming a complete cycle of writing practice that emphasizes continuous improvement.

4. Problems and Solutions

Although this lesson effectively embodies the POA's principle of "output-driven learning," several issues emerged during the actual teaching process, as summarized below:

(1) High requirement of initial output leads to expression difficulties for some students

In the "motivating" stage, students were required to participate in an debate and present complete arguments. While this helped boost learning motivation, some students with weaker language foundations found it difficult to express themselves effectively due to a lack of support, which often caused anxiety and hindered their enthusiasm for further learning[18].

(2) Same input scaffolding fails to meet different learning needs

The "enabling" phase relied heavily on the textbook text. Although it helped students understand the structure and argumentative techniques of the model essay, it overlooked individual cognitive differences, resulting in a situation where advanced learners were not sufficiently challenged and struggling learners found the material difficult to digest.

(3) Insufficient feedback mechanisms hinder effective rewriting

Despite having clear evaluation criteria and incorporating peer and teacher assessments, the guidance provided during the revision process was limited. As a result, students often found it difficult to make meaningful improvements based on feedback.

(4) Weak structural training leads to unclear writing logic

While the teaching emphasized the use of linking words and paragraph structures, training in overall argumentative logic was relatively weak[19]. Students struggled to maintain coherence between their arguments and supporting evidence.

(5) Lack of innovation in language output and over-reliance on model texts

Some students heavily borrowed sentences and structures from the textbook, lacking personalized expression and limiting their creative use of language[20].

From this case study, it is evident that POA holds great potential in guiding and scaffolding high school English writing instruction. It fosters authentic expression under the "output-driven" concept.However, its effective implementation still requires scientifically designed teaching procedures, a layered support system, and a comprehensive feedback mechanism. Only through such integration can the goal of "learning through use and applying what is learned" be fully achieved[21].

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

In response to the above issues, the following suggestions are proposed to inform future instructional reforms and improvements:

(1) Break down output tasks reasonably and design a progressive output path

Teachers should design output tasks in a phased and differentiated manner according to students' cognitive levels and language proficiency, avoiding full production at the beginning. This can help reduce language anxiety and build learning confidence.

(2) Diversify input scaffolds to meet differentiated learning needs

In the "enabling" phase, teachers should provide a range of support resources tailored to students' differences, including model texts, structural diagrams, language lists, and expression templates, to enhance adaptability and teaching effectiveness[22].

(3) Establish a dynamic evaluation system to strengthen formative feedback

In the "assessing" phase, evaluation should shift from summative to continuous and formative models, integrating teacher comments, peer reviews, and self-reflection to truly "promote learning through assessment."

(4) Strengthen logical thinking training to enhance overall writing competence

English writing is not merely a process of language expression, but also a reflection of logical reasoning and argument construction. Teachers should guide students in the logical construction of argumentative writing to improve their reasoning and coherence.

(5) Encourage personalized expression to avoid language "templating"

To prevent overdependence on model language, teachers can incorporate rewriting tasks, perspective-shifting exercises, and authentic context simulations to stimulate students' linguistic creativity and foster individual writing styles.

6. Conclusion

Through a real case, this paper explores the application of the Production-Oriented Approach (POA) in high school English writing instruction. Through an in-depth analysis of an actual classroom lesson, it finds that the POA model has notable advantages in stimulating motivation, clarifying instructional goals, and guiding structured expression. However, challenges remain in the practical implementation of initial output tasks, input support, and feedback mechanisms, which require further refinement.

Also, it seems difficult for teachers to use POA in their class on account of the implemented difficulties. How to adjust the class process more suitable for high school students and more easy for them? It still needs to explore[23].

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